

✓ COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS FRIDAY AUGUST 28, 1964

by Dr. A. Blair Knapp

President of Denison University

President Fawcett, members of the Graduating Class, Members of the Faculty, distinguished guests and friends. It is a privilege to be with you this morning. I must confess at the outset that I am strongly allergic to Commencement addresses, whether delivered by someone else or by myself. As nearly as I can tell, this prejudice goes back to my own graduation from college, which occurred many more years ago than I care to confess. I have long since forgotten what the speaker on that occasion had to say, but I still remember what he talked about--he talked about an hour and a half. Those who manage this occasion have wisely given me a limitation of twenty minutes and I assure you that my own prejudice in the matter will insure that I will be well within these limits.

I have one other confession. I think this is only the third time in my professional life when I have spoken from manuscript. I do prefer the rather more free-wheeling that speaking from notes permits. I speak from manuscript this morning out of consideration for President Fawcett's ulcers, (which I assume he has since they are an occupational disease of all college presidents). When

he called me on the phone and invited me to make these remarks, I told him that I would probably not use a manuscript. I thought I detected in his response a bit of a concern about this. So, President Fawcett, I hope you are somewhat relieved.

It is a privilege to be here this morning because of the great respect I have for this institution, its president, staff and faculty. This is a great respect I have, not only as the president of a sister institution in Ohio, but also because, since I am a citizen of this state, this is my University too. I am proud of Ohio State from both points of view.

I attempt no learned discussion of educational philosophy this morning. I offer to you graduates no formula for success in your chosen fields. I shall not try to give advice, which you wouldn't accept in any event. I do have some concerns about you and what may or may not be the outcome of the lives you will lead in the future. I am troubled as to whether the contributions you will make in your community, to your country and to the world may be adequate for our troubled times. When I say I am thus troubled about you, let me make it clear that my concern is not confined to this class, but includes all

graduates of all kinds of colleges and universities in the United States in this decade, including the graduates of my own institution.

I said that I was not going to talk about education, but I must make a comment or two about higher education today because some of the characteristics of higher education in the United States today provide the basis of some of the concerns about you to which I referred. We all know that there is a frenzied attempt these days to "gear up" our institutions of higher education to meet the challenge of the times, both in quantity of students and the indispensable quality of the job to be done. Unfortunately, we are forced to attempt this through crash programs to make up for years of neglect. There is on the part of millions of our people a kind of blind faith that, if more and more of our college age youth may someday sit where you sit now on this occasion, all will be well with our world. Frankly, I'm not so sure - all is not perfect by any means with what we do today in our colleges and universities.

I realize, of course, that what I am about to say are generalizations. There are many exceptions, but my own experience, plus the stress of the professional literature, bears out the fact that they are all



too true.

Let me quote Mr. Henry Prentice, who some years ago was President and later Chairman of the Board of The Armstrong Cork Company. In addition to his brilliant career as an industrial leader, he was in every sense a scholar. (I quote) "We have been so long developing our physical resources that we have compelled our schools and colleges to concentrate on teaching facts on which we could make a living to the almost total neglect of the philosophic and religious principles which ultimately determine the whole course of human existence." (End quote.)

Then there has been, for the past fifteen years at least, a steady increase in the domination of the cult of objectivity in our teaching. No classroom, of course, ought now to be the place for propaganda, or for the presentation of the prejudiced point of view of the instructor. On the other hand, to blindly become the slave of an often times pseudo-scientific method which alleges that only proven facts are pertinent material for discussion and consideration tends to obscure the basic truth that there are things that are

right and things that are wrong; that there are ideas and ideals and values which are important, even though they may not be capable of scientific proof. This so-called objectivity is in part the cause of "the total neglect of the philosophic and religious principles that ultimately determine the whole course of human existence."

Let me quote again, this time from Ordway Tead - a distinguished educator, scholar and writer. (I quote) "There shouldn't be 'one truth' but there needs to be a recognition of present intellectual and moral confusion, ethical neutrality and negativism, and spiritual nihilism." (End quote)

Then there is the excessive specialization which characterizes higher education today, not only in the University's graduate schools, but even in Liberal Arts Colleges such as my own. A true story illustrates somewhat what I mean. A young history professor in a Liberal Arts College was discussing his field. He described it as the history of local government in southeastern France in the first half of the sixteenth century. This moved one of his colleagues to ask, tongue in cheek "Yes, but which decade?"

My own institution, a Liberal Arts College, is committed to the ideal of the inter-relationships of the disciplines, to the concept of the integration of the curriculum and to the principle of the synthesis of knowledge. Yet, even here, members of the faculty are literally torn apart between their devotion to their educational ideals on the one hand and the increasing pressure which grows constantly, not only to confine their scholarly work to one discipline, but increasingly to smaller and smaller sub-specialities within that discipline. It seems to me to be ironic that in this day, when so much progress is being made on the peripheries of two or more disciplines (bio-chemistry for example) that at this very time the content of our work is being fragmented to the point that any real integration of knowledge becomes increasingly difficult.

I read recently in a local paper what purported to be a true story. A businessman reached retirement age and, since his pension was small, chose a small college town in which to spend his retirement years, believing that he could find companionship with the faculty of the local



institution. He reported that he was reasonably satisfied with his decision. The faculty were fine people but (and I quote) "of course most of them are not educated people, as is commonly believed. They are specialists, highly trained in some particular field, but not educated people, which is not so bad. If you want to talk about geology, invite a geology professor to dinner, but be sure to remember not to talk to him about anything else."

This trend toward complete dedication to one discipline to the exclusion of all else is having serious consequences in our colleges and universities. There is a companion trend, for which the managers of our institutions of higher learning must accept responsibility; namely, that promotion, either in rank or salary or both, is becoming increasingly determined by the linear length or pound weight of a man's publications, with little or no consideration being given to teaching effectiveness and without very much concern about the quality, purpose or import of the publications themselves. These two trends are depreciating the quality of the teaching art in this country and are making a mockery of our lofty statements of educational purpose, especially at the undergraduate level.

There is another current phenomenon in higher education which, if not checked or moderated, will become an educational scandal. I refer to the hysterical competition between institutions for the presumably best qualified scholar in which the chief lure, in addition to a high salary, is an absurd reduction in teaching load, so that in many cases this top professor is spared the contamination of contact with any students at all. Please understand - research and publication are indeed important aspects of the function of higher education, but why must we let the older and still sound concept of the teacher-scholar go down the drain?

If these trends persist, I predict that higher education is in for real trouble and this nation which hopes, which expects so much, from the colleges and universities in terms of providing the quality of leadership so vital to the safety and welfare of this world will not only be sorely disappointed, but will be greatly disillusioned.

You, like most graduates of our colleges and universities of stature, have been well trained for your chosen professions and endeavors. This is good, but it isn't good enough. All knowledge, intellectual power is



good, but of itself, it's not good enough. In knowledge alone there is as much great power for evil as there is for good. Knowledge must be accompanied by something else that will give direction and purpose of a constructive sort in its application.

World War II, with all of its horrors resulting in chaos through much of the world, chaos which is still with us, provides us with proof of this. By all objective standards, Germany was in the front rank in educational development. Scholars from around the world journeyed there for advanced training. Yet with all of this great educational achievement, an Adolph Hitler could with astonishing ease pervert the whole nation to the acceptance of false ideologies and to a course of action that was barbaric and utterly without moral foundation. Here was a nation with great educational stature. They had the knowledge, but they lacked the something else.

John Stone Dickey, the President of Dartmouth, puts it this way (I quote) "To create the power of competence without creating a corresponding sense of moral direction to guide the use of power, is bad education".

A celebrated anthropologist of The University of Pennsylvania, whose name slips my mind, was talking about the same thing when he wrote (I quote) "A future worth contemplating will not be achieved solely by flights to the other side of the moon. It will not be found in space. It will be achieved, if it is achieved at all, only in our individual hearts." (End quotes)

Thus I approach the heart of what I came here this morning to say. Perhaps now you begin to see what my concerns are about you and those like you throughout the land - you have a fine store of factual knowledge, technical skills, training for your chosen field of endeavor. But do you have this something else? My reason for citing some criticisms of higher education in the United States today is because I honestly feel that we have not helped you enough to acquire this something else. I am sure that some of you - perhaps many of you - have had individual teachers who have broken out of the currently accepted emphasis. You are fortunate indeed if this is the case. You have had some help in developing this something else. But I am equally sure that many of you are going to have "to go it alone." My one purpose this morning is to stress how desperately important it is that you do so.

This something else is of course a deep concern for, a deliberate commitment to, and responsible involvement in the great problems which threaten this nation internally, as well as in relation to other peoples in the world. These require that each of you must consciously evolve for yourself a philosophy and a faith by which you are going to be willing to lead your lives. Your God-given talents have been sharpened by your training here - you have three choices - to use these talents and do your part to pull your full weight in these difficult and dangerous days; or you can "play it cool" and sit on the side-lines hoping that others will do more than their fair share to offset your aloofness; or thirdly, of course you can use your skills in a way which will compound the difficulties.

It is perfectly understandable that one of your first concerns is to establish your own families and to have an opportunity to lead your own lives with dignity and security for you and yours, but I submit that the security and dignity of your own depends far more than ever before on your concern, commitment, and responsible involvement in the larger problems of our day.



I can remember in my own lifetime when it was fashionable for speakers to say that the then current generation suffered from lack of worlds to conquer. The geographic frontier was only recently gone. The day of the pioneer was finished. What terrible prophets they were! Geographically speaking, the world perhaps does not offer the venturesome the same pioneering opportunities as it did a century ago, but look at the frontiers of 1964 that lie before you. We are on the threshold of man's triumph over many diseases which have ravaged past generations; the entirely new frontiers of automation in its many forms and to serious dislocations temporarily produced; the slumbering frontier of Civil Rights, human freedom, and the right to human dignity has exploded so that none of us can longer ignore it; in the lifetime of many in this room, a nation of 80% rural population has become an urban nation with more than 70% in the cities, creating wholly unprecedented problems and presenting you with innumerable new frontiers to be pioneered; problems of the underdeveloped countries and the underdeveloped peoples of the world we ignore at our peril; juvenile delinquency frightens us. We'd rather forget about it, but

we can't unless we are willing to seriously endanger our own security. In truth, I suppose I should have said delinquency - both juvenile and adult - because I am certain that the latter is largely responsible for the former. We could go on and on. There are worlds aplenty for you to conquer. You risk all you want in this world for you and yours if you turn your back on them and hope that someone else will carry the load.

These great and difficult problems which face our country in the second half of this century are not to be quickly nor easily solved. There are those who would give us pat answers and would over-simplify the solutions. Hopefully, your training here will guard you from falling into this trap.

Let us understand full well that solutions must be found, no matter how difficult they may be and no matter how long it may take. We Americans are by nature optimists. Our history is so relatively short, our progress so relatively great, our success so unprecedented in a materialistic sense, that we find it very difficult to understand that these problems which

I have mentioned can spell our downfall.

Perhaps it would be wise to stop and listen to Mr. Ralph

Besse - Cleveland industrialist - speaking at Heidelberg College in 1957

when he said (quote) "China and Persia had cultures which matured and

withered. Babylon and Carthage had civilizations which disappeared. Greece

and Rome had golden ages which decayed. Spain and England had empires

which disintegrated. Germany and Austria had scientific zeniths which

exploded. And now the United States sits on top of a mountain top, complacent

of her precarious balance, jealous of the material power which placed her

there, and careless of the spiritual and intellectual power which alone can

keep her there. If anyone is to see her peril and guard her lofty position, it

must be her young men and women like yourselves - the college and university

graduates of the second half of this century. This is your challenge, this is

your opportunity, this is your solemn obligation. You must not fail." (End quote).



I have talked about the something more than knowledge, know how, skill and competence that is essential if the outcome of your lives is to be socially, morally and civically significant. I referred to this "something more" in terms of concern, commitment, and responsible involvement in affairs beyond those of self.

Concern will manifest itself when you realize in your mind and heart that in a true sense in this world, which grows increasingly smaller year by year in terms of time and distance, we each are our brother's keeper. Concern for others - concern for the unsolved problems of our day - will come as a function of maturity and with an intellectual comprehension of the consequences of apathy and disinterest.

Commitment will be a solemn choice - you obviously cannot commit yourself to every situation which needs attention. Commitment will grow naturally out of a deep concern in which you feel compelled to act.

Responsible involvement is perhaps the most difficult. Simple involvement is easy - responsible involvement is quite a different matter.

It is easy enough to sign a petition - to parade on a picket line - to wave a banner in a protest meeting. Perhaps my prejudices are showing, but it seems to me this sort of thing is pretty superficial. I doubt very much that such activity contributes anything of lasting value to the solutions of tough problems. Responsible involvement begins, it seems to me, with the individual by himself, if he has concern and determines to commit himself - the first step is an intellectual one of determining the facts and sorting out the details of the problem and the alternative proposals for its solution - then the time-worn methods of discussion, persuasion, and political action become the basis for most responsible involvement. Organizations such as the Peace Corps, which has been astonishingly successful in a short time, offer responsible involvement for others.

It is not my purpose to spell out the specific terms or involvement that you will find significant for you. I wish only to try to reach you with the message which I so thoroughly believe to be true in our time that for you to be concerned, committed and responsibly involved at some point and soon

is the great need of America and the world.

Perhaps in closing I can best sum it all up with a true story.

Before becoming President of Denison, I was Vice-President of Temple University in Philadelphia. This, today, is a huge institution, rivaling Ohio State in size. It was founded a few decades ago by Dr. Russell Conwell, who invited six students to meet with him three times a week in the evening. Dr. Conwell was a famous lecturer and his most famous lecture was "Acres of Diamonds." He delivered this same lecture thousands of times throughout the world, receiving millions in lecture fees, all of which were devoted to the building of Temple University.

Dr. Conwell was probably the first citizen of Philadelphia in his time. Every effort for community development would find Dr. Conwell in a position of leadership and responsibility. One day a friend and admirer was visiting in his home. The friend turned to Dr. Conwell and asked "How can you do so much for others - so much for the community?"

Dr. Conwell took his friend into his study and pointed to the



wall behind his desk on which was hung a dress sword of Civil War vintage.

Then he replied to the question (Quote) "When I was a young man I was a junior officer in the Union Army. As was the custom then, I took with me to war a young boy as orderly. My fellow townspeople gave me this sword when I left home. Johnny Ring was my orderly's name. It was his pride and joy to care for my sword and to keep it shining bright. One day when I was absent, the Confederates attacked our camp. The Union troops - Johnny Ring with them, retreated across the river on a railroad trestle. When he got to the other side, Johnny realized that he had forgotten my sword, which was hanging in my tent. Back across the trestle went Johnny - secured the sword and sought to re-cross the river, but by that time the bridge was on fire and he couldn't make it. Soldiers on both sides saw his plight - both stopped firing and shouted to him to jump into the river. He did, but his clothes were on fire and he was burned so badly that he died two days later." Dr. Conwell then turned to his questioner and said "You see, Johnny Ring gave his life as a sacrifice to his concept of duty and his idea of service to me. Therefore, I must live two lives,

one for myself and one for Johnny Ring." (End quote) My young friends, we all

have our Johnny Rings. Each of you has a Johnny Ring somewhere in your life.

Each of us must live two lives too, one for ourselves and one for our fellow men.

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